

Memory and Fiction in Gothic Spaces

By

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Master of Fine Arts, Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design

OCAD University, Brianne Service, 2018

Abstract

Memory and Fiction in Gothic Spaces addresses how we look at and experience Gothic interior space through methodologies of painting. Grounded in my personal experiences of living in Florence Italy, the project seeks to coalesce memory and nostalgia through the themes of the sublime and the uncanny. The exhibition and paper examine how Gothic interiors inspire awe and trigger memory, asking the viewer to question and reflect on their understanding of the real and the unreal. Informed by an interdisciplinary methodology, I have researched specific qualities of Gothic architecture; included case studies and employed a triad of methods that includes digital photography, digital collage and representational painting. This methodology has allowed me to create a pictorial language as a way to understand and rediscover my identity in Canada after returning from Italy. The results include three large-scale paintings that incorporate images of the Canadian landscape and of Gothic Revival architecture.

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*In dedication to my Mom and Dad,
Diane and Bob Service.*

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*The interior becomes the repository for memories of
fully embodied sensory experiences.
– Stephen Holl*

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the early 21st century, technology is overloading contemporary western society with information and visual imagery. Information Technology expert Cathy Gonzalez states that, “The amount of knowledge in the world has doubled in the past ten years and is doubling every 18 months according to the American Society of Training and Documentation ” (2004). This ubiquitous and abundant amount of information and visuals can be customized and accentuated through a social media sphere of Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat applications before sharing, which perhaps is altering perceptions of ourselves and the world around us as these platforms create illusions of reality. If behaviour is learned from the environment through observational learning (Bandura 270), the process of image making is of particular importance in terms of communicating an idea or an experience. Reality and fantasy are confused as we question what is real and what isn’t and our imaginations fill in the gaps. This is both theatrical and bizarre. Reflecting on the urban environment, could architectural spaces be perceived histrionically by the same manner of customizing and accentuating various modalities of image making?

This paper examines how we look at and experience Gothic interior space through methods of painting. The research is grounded in my personal experiences of living in Florence Italy, and seeks to coalesce memory and nostalgia through an investigation of the sublime and the uncanny, which I have personally experienced. These two themes are explored through the narration of Gothic fiction, placing Gothic interiors at the core of the inquiry, with digital collages, sketches, small studies and large-scale oil paintings as the final output. Narration here is defined as a modality of rendering the memory of experiential space. I posit that Gothic interior spaces are

theatrical, histrionic and deliberately used to evoke an emotional response, rather than solely evoking a religious experience. These spaces inspire awe and also trigger personal memory, as they are also spaces that are strangely familiar to me, recalling my immersion in the Gothic architecture of Italy.

Using an interdisciplinary methodology, I'm researching specific qualities of Gothic architecture as they reflect the sublime and its relationship to my art practice. I am using a triad of methods in this project: digital photography, digital collage, and representational painting, to accentuate and customize a pictorial language as a way to understand and rediscover myself in Canada after moving home from Italy two years ago.

Background And Context

Toronto's Gothic architecture is nostalgic for me because it triggers memories of my life in Florence Italy. I moved to Florence to complete my Bachelor of Fine Arts at OCAD University's Off-Campus program and lived there for five years. I was drawn to the Gothic style as I immersed myself in the predominant Gothic art and architecture of the city. Enamoured by the Italian culture, the architecture was beguiling and quickly became a subject in my paintings while studying Fine Arts and Art History. The Italian culture seeped into my veins and provided me immense growth not only as an artist, but also as a person. I learned how to speak Italian fluently during this time. I rode my bike every day in the narrow streets where the smells of bakeries and sewers combatively filled the area. Sounds of ambulances, the romantic Italian language incessantly shouted and the church bells filled the air. Spaces of incongruity were inescapable on an extremely multi-sensorial level. The buildings were demarcated by the flood of 1966 and served as a constant reminder to the public that the River Arno could once again overflow at any

given time. I lived beside Casa Buonarroti (the House of Michelangelo) in an apartment that dated back to the 14th century, which housed nurses who worked at one of the first hospitals in the world, L'Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova (the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova). Living in this dated apartment was like living inside a cavity of history where I often dreamt of elderly women praying on their knees, a haunting dream that involuntarily visited my sleep more often than I preferred. I also dreamt (and still dream) of moving through water in various ways: swimming, sinking, floating, paddling, bathing, diving, drowning, treading, splashing and feverishly lapping through to no given place. Dreaming of water perhaps stems from the fear of the 1966 flood. The recurrence of water in my dreams has manifested itself in my paintings. Water is a very powerful symbol and a universal solvent that washes over, clears away, purifies and cleanses. It is spiritual and healing. Water is also a conduit of universal energy and is very important in many religions. I use the image of water as a creative impetus in attempts to re-establish my Canadian identity through cleansing and settling my feelings that stem from leaving my life in Italy.

Using water as metaphor also relates to my experience of swimming during my 2017 summer artist's residency in Duntara, Newfoundland in a 'pond' where the water's depth was unknown. It was said that not even locals would swim these waters. The experience was thrilling as much as it was incredibly terrifying as I swam with only extremely experienced swimmers. Drawing upon this experience, while working in my studio, I envisioned an invented immersion in a Gothic interior (the metaphor for memory of my past) and imagined filling it with water (my Canadian presence). As the water enters the Cathedrals, it is symbolically cleansing the space and resolving any feelings of terror or anxiety.

As I find myself on Canadian soil again, the process of self-discovery is imperative in order to

readapt to life in my homeland and I have developed a new appreciation for my beloved country and its landscape. According to the Royal Canadian Geographical Society (Doyle), Canada holds the most lakes in the world, including the five great lakes, and is bordered by three oceans: the Arctic, the Pacific and the Atlantic. As well, my hometown, the city of Hamilton, has been called the waterfall capital of the world with over 100 waterfalls according to the Hamilton Conservation Authority. Painting Gothic interiors is the metaphor of my mind filled with history and memories of a life that transformed my identity. Using photography and digital collaging, I juxtaposed photographs taken during the art residency in Newfoundland last summer and repositioned them with my photography of Toronto's Gothic structures. I am undertaking this work in an effort to produce a reality wherein I can reacclimatize myself without losing a coveted part of my history. Creating hybrid Gothic tales through my digital collages and paintings, I evoke the sublime and the uncanny as ways of playing with history and elusive memories.

Research Objectives And Intentions

This investigation has been a personal trajectory of self-discovery after returning to my homeland. My project will investigate interior spaces and how I react to them, through creative process and artistic production. I'm hoping to develop a clearer understanding of how interior spaces embody a historical imprint with fantasy and reality. Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa explains in his book, *The Eyes of the Skin*, the importance of a multi-sensorial experience within architectural spaces and I explore this idea through painting in order to investigate the Gothic interior as a metaphor for my vivid memories. Another aim is to examine to what extent painting is capable of coalescing memory and nostalgia through narrating themes of the sublime and the uncanny. The theme of the double is expressed through representation in my paintings in order to express the theme of the uncanny.

I am exploring two main questions:

- 1) How can we examine Gothic interiors through representational painting?
- 2) To what extent can contemporary painting unfold an evocative capacity with respect to the uncanny, the sublime or memory?

Rationale

This investigation considers how visual imagery has the capacity to create new realities for the sake of connecting identity with a homeland. Culture shock is inevitable in the experience of changing environments and the challenge for most is to create new realities without losing cultural identity. The struggle of not only culture shock but also its reverse is a phenomenon many immigrants and travellers may experience.

Literature Review | Theoretical Framework

This section provides a critical framework of theories that address a philosophical inquiry of the sublime and its effects on the body when immersed in spaces of grandeur. Texts on interior space and its effects on our reactions are given in this thesis. The Freudian theory of the uncanny is explored through an analysis of the strangely familiar. Case studies of artists working with similar themes are presented in this project as figures of inspiration. As well, there is also an overview of Gothic history in architecture, which supports my studio-based practice.

Scope And Limitations

The majority of Gothic architecture in Toronto consists of religious structures and I have chosen three churches due to their congregational space, aesthetics and vicinity in the urban environment. Gothic churches in Toronto remind me of my life in Florence and these buildings create a sense of

nostalgia for me, solely for their architectural elements. The buildings I've chosen to use as subjects in my paintings are St. Mary's Church, St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica and the Cathedral Church of St. James.

To set a framework for the writing to follow, I will outline the process of this thesis paper. First, I will provide an analysis of the concepts of Gothic architectural interiors in order to establish a working knowledge of how interior space may be experienced. Second, I will describe my interdisciplinary methodology used to support and drive my artistic practice. Then, I will generate a discussion of the creative work and findings in the final section of the paper, concluding with questions and avenues for future investigation in my paintings.

I confront the city with my body; my legs measure the length of the arcade and the width of the square; my gaze unconsciously projects my body onto the facade of the cathedral, where it roams over the mouldings and contours, sensing the size of recesses and projections; my body weight meets the mass of the cathedral door, and my hand grasps the door pull as I enter the dark void behind it. I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me.
- Juhani Pallasmaa

Chapter 2: Literature Review | Theoretical Framework

This chapter is divided into three parts and provides an analysis of architectural spaces I have encountered that attribute to a bodily experience, ultimately guiding my thinking, decision-making and work. This research provides an understanding of the reactions some may encounter when immersed in something physically larger than oneself. The first part provides an analysis of the mystery of Gothic interior spaces. The second part involves a philosophical analysis of how one may experience spaces of immensity and the sublime. The third part investigates the theatrics of familiar spaces and the role of the uncanny in depictions of Gothic architecture.

2.1: The Interior

Through a study of phenomenological thinking¹ and theories of Juhani Pallasmaa and Gaston Bachelard, I investigate multi-sensorial aspects of Gothic interior spaces. What interests me most about interior space is the mystery that lies within the light and shadows, as well as the sensorial experiences and emotional responses the body has within their walls. Dark spaces can ignite the imagination and trigger memory, and I find Gothic interiors to be the perfect setting for this, due to their haunting atmosphere and historical imprints on their interior walls accumulated over the

¹ As defined in the Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Methods, phenomenological research is the study of lived or experiential meaning and attempts to describe and interpret these meanings in the ways that they emerge and are shaped by consciousness, language, our cognitive and noncognitive sensibilities, and by our preunderstandings and presuppositions (614).

years. Juhani Pallasmaa states, "A piece of architecture should not become transparent in its utilitarian and rational motives; it has to maintain its impenetrable secret and mystery in order to ignite our imagination and emotion" (65). Gothic interior space acts as a metaphor for the memory of my life in Europe and I try to illustrate an interior immensity of memory that confronts remembrance and presence simultaneously in my work. As Pallasmaa argues,

We have an innate capacity for remembering and imagining places. Perception, memory and imagination are in constant interaction; the domain of presence fuses into images of memory and fantasy. We keep constructing an immense city of evocation and remembrance, and all the cities we have visited are precincts in this metropolis of the mind. (72).

My paintings of Gothic interiors evoke this complex interaction of my memories and fantasies as I paint in a metaphorical reversal of external and internal spaces.

American artist James Casebere builds architectural models in his studio and photographs their interiors becoming flooded. Casabere is most interested in exploring our relationship to institutionalized spaces, in particular prisons and hospitals, and also uses water as a metaphor. In his interview with Bomb Magazine, Casabere explains, "the water as a metaphor is about the passage of time. It's about temporality" (Juarez, "James Casebere"). His images have influenced my work in terms of subject matter, however, I have focused primarily on Gothic interiors. What also differentiates us is that photography is Casabere's creative output where I have found through my practice that painting creates a more convincing reality of representing interior space. Photography acts as a tool in my process.

In his book titled *The Poetics of Space*, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard explains recollecting memory, "if we have retained an element of dream in our memories, if we have gone beyond merely assembling exact recollections, bit by bit the house that was lost in the mists of

time will appear from out the shadow" (57). As the interior serves as a metaphor, the fragments of memory are depicted in my paintings through bracketing and painting only certain details of the setting.

Interior spaces are intimate spaces, much like the privacy of our own minds. Explaining the enigma of the interior mind, Bachelard states,

The intimacy of the room becomes our intimacy. And correlatively, intimate space has become so quiet, so simple, that all the quietude of the room is localized and centralized in it. The room is very deeply our room, it is in us. We no longer see it. It no longer limits us, because we are in the very ultimate depth of its repose that it has conferred upon us (226).

I'm also interested in representing the memory of immensity in my images. I try to give the paintings more depth by pushing the limits of the picture plane in order to achieve an illusion of distance. I'm trying to share an experience by depicting exterior elements within an interior space. Bachelard states, "The diversity of the images is unified in the depths of 'inner space'. This is a conclusive formula... I want to make on the correspondence between the immensity of world space and the depth of 'inner space'" (205). By creating a combination of these spatial opposites in my paintings, and through these juxtapositions, the inner space of the mind can imagine the exterior space within it.

In recovering and preserving memories, light and shadows play a major role in my paintings. I accentuate the lights and the darks to create more of a dramatic and moody effect within the ominous interiors. Using strong tonal contrasts makes the paintings visually believable and the darkness of the space aligns with the passing of time and memory. I try to capture light and accentuate it in order to draw attention to details in the painting. As Bachelard states, "Among the most difficult memories, well beyond any geometry that can be drawn, we must recapture the

quality of the light; then come the sweet smells that linger in the empty rooms, setting an aerial seal on each room in the house of memory." (60). I'm not only interested in triggering the visual sense but also drawing attention to other senses that are linked with memory.

In his book titled, *The Eyes of the Skin, Architecture and the Senses*, Juhani Pallasmaa writes about how the senses have been neglected over many centuries in the Western world and how to reconsider spaces to be multi-sensorial by calling attention to the various senses other than sight. Drawing on his theories, I wonder how painting has the capacity to evoke emotions and am interested in the multi-sensorial experience of painting through the use of material and representations of lighting effects. My engagement with oil painting is multi-sensorial and I'm trying to interpret the sensual side of painting as a similar experience to witnessing architecture, trying to capture the feeling of being in that space. I agree with Pallasmaa's contention that,

Painting and sculpture also seem to be losing their sensuality; instead of inviting a sensory intimacy, contemporary works of art frequently signal distancing rejection of sensuous curiosity and pleasure. These works speak to the intellect and to the conceptualizing capacities instead of addressing the senses and the undifferentiated bodily responses. The ceaseless bombardment of unrelated imagery leads only to a gradual emptying of images of their emotional content. (35).

Consequently, I try to focus on senses that are engaged while painting. My haptic contact with the medium is established through the paintbrush and the olfactory system is activated by the scent of the oils and solvents. Oil paintings also tend to emit a particular scent. At this point, many senses are immersed in the substance of paint and an intimate interaction occurs with the paint and canvas. Pallasmaa writes, "... the task of art and architecture in general is to reconstruct the experience of an undifferentiated interior world, in which we are not mere spectators, but to which we inseparably belong" (28). Since memory is not fully accessible, I paint interior spaces that draw me closer to the world of memory and presence. Painting light and darkness also creates

a sense of mood and many emotions are evoked as I render an image realistically and draw myself closer to the memories I hope to preserve in my mind and represent on canvas.

Light and shadow both play a substantial role in my work and I employ the painting technique called *chiaroscuro*, the dramatic use of light and shadow, to invite fantasy and imagination into the Gothic interior. According to Pallasmaa, the controlling of light depends heavily on shadows: "the shadow gives shape and life to the object in light. It also provides the realm from which fantasies and dreams arise... there is a constant, deep breathing of shadow and light; shadow inhales and illumination exhales light" (51). Concentrating on this painting technique allows me to highlight and accentuate details of Gothic architecture that excite my senses. In creating spaces of intimacy, Pallasmaa states,

Deep shadows and darkness are essential because they dim the sharpness of vision and invite unconscious peripheral vision and tactile fantasy... homogeneous bright light paralyzes the imagination in the same way that homogenization eliminates the experience of being, and wipes away the sense of place. (50)

In painting dramatic light and shadows, the viewer may experience peripheral vision not just within the space encountered but also on a two-dimensional plane, creating an illusion of depth and perhaps drawing the viewer into the space. The accentuation of light and shadow conveyed in my paintings could perhaps be considered on a broader social scale to be a reaction to modernism and utopian applications to spaces of transparency, the "paradigm of total control" (Vidler 168). As I live in a world saturated with technology and images, perhaps my work signals a leaning towards privacy, solitude and resensualizing experiences, a movement away from non-emotional minimalism and modernity.

2.2: The Sublime

An analysis of the sublime and its effects on the body relates to my interest in understanding and depicting the grandiosity of Gothic interiors. In aesthetics, the sublime refers to a state of awe from perceiving that which is great or grandiose in nature. Edmund Burke, in his work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), splits aesthetic perception into two categories: separating beauty, derived from pleasure, from the sublime, which is derived from pain. He explains,

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion, which the mind is capable of feeling. (131)

Burke's theory suggests that the sublime lies in the pleasure of terror and pain, witnessing our own mortality, contrasting our diminutive human form against enormous heights, greatness and heavenliness. It is dark and silent in solitude. For Burke, the qualities of objects of the sublime embody great dimensionality and obscurity, as they are dark and gloomy in their presence, diverse from that which is considered beautiful. Having this in mind, I produce paintings at a large scale that tower over the body of the viewer and reference these qualities that evoke such strong emotions. Burke's theory of the sublime parallels the elements of Gothic architecture and the dark side of obscure spaces that I find most intriguing. The Gothic can evoke terror; one of the key elements of this style of architecture. The impact Gothic architecture has on the viewer is visceral and often times overwhelming and this is evoked through the manipulation of scale, light and monumentality.

Theorist Kate Nesbitt suggests a reemergence of the sublime and the beautiful in order to understand modernity (177) and that the sublime was concealed as a reaction to the repression of avant-garde abstraction in painting. She states,

The sudden rebirth of interest in the sublime is explicable on a number of levels. First is the emphasis on the knowledge of architecture through phenomenology, which foregrounds a fundamental issue in aesthetics: the effect on the viewer of a work of architecture. (180)

Nesbitt verifies my interest in the phenomenological aspects of experiential space and underscores the relevancy of the theory of the sublime in contemporary painting. I explore the theme of the sublime in my work in order to study the body's sensorial reactions to spaces of immensity.

What interests me most about the theory of the sublime is the potential of the image to affect the physical body, in reaction to immensity and the forces that press upon us that are outside of our normal reality. With these ideas in mind, I'm interested in exploring how painting at a large scale can move the viewer by developing a narrative of evocations of the sublime, particularly astonishment and awe. According to Burke, astonishment is reached upon meeting that which is grandiose and sublime, evoking a certain degree of horror, where all emotions are arrested. For Burke and his readers in the 18th century, evocation was to be found in natural phenomenon. For me, the sublime can be found in Gothic buildings as often as in the natural world. Nature is both beautiful and terrifying, similar to certain Gothic interiors I've experienced while living in Europe. The sublime, as represented in my paintings, includes infinity of space and vastness as represented in height, magnificence and obscurity. The idea of infinity is something I'm cognizant of while painting, as each mark of paint seems to reach an infinite amount of brushstrokes and I get lost in the process. In terms of scale, the measurement of the human body creates a sense of awe, vastness and wonderment and I seek to replicate this in my paintings. I question: can

painting large-scale evoke for me the same feeling of wonderment and awe? Dimensionality and representational painting invite the viewer in to move throughout the space. Personally, large-scale paintings allow me to encapsulate the grandeur of a memory, enveloping me and drawing me closer to the memory of my past.



Fig. 1: *The Rothko Chapel*, Mark Rothko, oil on canvas, 1964-1967. Source: www.markrothko.org/rothko-chapel

The late Mark Rothko, an American painter in the Abstract Expressionist period who was famous for his paintings conveying spirituality and human emotion, was influenced by the philosophical sublime. His paintings explored the sublime in the modern world of the 20th century, as he worked with scale and the reduction of colour in many of his paintings, positioning the viewer at a distance in order to feel the effects of vastness. His paintings are incredibly visceral, and Rothko hoped to engulf the viewer and evoke feelings of the sublime, which parallel my work in terms of our interest in astonishment. However, I am working in a representational style of painting and hope to evoke not only feelings of the sublime, but also of the uncanny (the strangely familiar). In my paintings, there is a sense of terror as the natural trepidations of water enter the interior space. I parallel Burke's theories of the sublime in regards to the terror of the natural element

invading the interior. The water is obscure and dark which might evoke feelings of the sublime due to the level of uncertainty and potential terror of being engulfed. As well, for me, depicting the natural phenomenon entering the man-made space symbolizes the frightening feeling of reverse culture shock: the overwhelming feeling of disorientation I felt when reentering my homeland.

What is problematic about the sublime is the power associated with the objective over the subjective. Do buildings evoke the feelings of the sublime due to their innate qualities? Or is it the subject who projects the sublime into the space? I suggest it is a synthesis of the two, a coexistence of things in space, an amalgamation of the container and the contained. My focus is on the phenomenological experience of Gothic interior space. I'm more interested in the phenomenology of the senses, rather than the objectivity of the sublime. Through my work, I'm trying to understand the capacity of painting to overwhelm the senses in the same manner as the sublime.

Another problem that arises with Burke's theory of the sublime is the notion that it is found primarily in the grandiose, without addressing small objects that can also engender feelings of the sublime. A miniature object enlarges the body's presence, while the object of immensity makes the viewer aware of our bodily scale, thereby reducing the viewer. The small studies I made during my residency in Newfoundland are very powerful in their colour, expressivity and miniature scale and I tried to capture the sublime in these sketches. I evoke the terror of Burkean sublime as it equates to the terror that I've felt through my feelings of losing my identity through the shock of reentry.

Bachelard describes the forest as the immediate immensity and gives several examples of poets who have described the feeling of immensity. My work considers the vastness of nature as I depict it entering the Gothic interior space. Referring to the non-objectivity of the immense, Bachelard writes, "Since immense is not an object, a phenomenology of immense would refer us directly to our imagining consciousness. In analyzing images of immensity, we should realize within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination" (184). I try to construct this notion of the immensity of pure being and imagination in my work when I construct my digital collages in Photoshop, allowing for the integration of imagination to enter the scene. This imaginative element of collage allows me to transcend the photograph, which is used as a tool for reference, and access the grandiose immensity of imagination through its translation into my paintings.

2.3: The Uncanny

The uncanny is another theme I explore in my paintings when considering the phenomenology of space. Professor Anthony Vidler delineates the sublime from the uncanny in his book titled *The Architectural Uncanny*. He states that, "the uncanny was intimately bound up with, but strangely different from the grandeur and more serious 'sublime', the master category of aspiration, nostalgia and the unattainable" (20). Furthermore, through the lens of Charles Nodier, he states, "The general space of the sublime is height, depth and extension... from that of the uncanny which is silent, solitude, of internal confinement and suffocation, that mental space where temporality and spatiality collapse" (39). The uncanny might be a guise for the sublime and in my paintings I try to explore the difference between the two.

Sigmund Freud described the uncanny as a psychological and aesthetic response to something terrifyingly familiar that has been repressed (123). Translated from the German word

‘unheimlich’, or the ‘unhomely’ as literally translated in English, that which does not belong to the home or the familiar is frightening and unsettling, and reveals itself through doubling, déjà vu, involuntary repetitions, fragmentation, reconfigurations of space and estrangement. These are feelings that one potentially experiences while living in a foreign country, as I have personally felt. Living in another country at times feels like living in someone else’s home, devoid of roots. A feeling of loss sets in and nostalgia follows soon after. The resurgence of the uncanny for me also expresses an anxiety of reverse culture shock and feelings of estrangement I have felt while recreating a life in my homeland once again.

I have been exploring different levels of representational painting than can arouse possible instances of these uncanny feelings, seeking to capture a sense of otherness and wonder on the picture plane. I have found that this can be achieved through spatial reconfiguration and the simulation of the real. The Gothic interior is the perfect setting for an embodied artistic intervention on spatial reconfiguration, where memories of the past recollect in the present. The setting is haunting and unsettling. Reconfiguration of space happens in my process through the juxtaposition of images in Photoshop, which is then used as photographic reference for my oil paintings to create a replication of the real. Vidler describes aspects of architecture in the urban environment as uncanny, a representation of a mental state of anxiety as a product of urban life after the shock of modernism. It is the locus of a deep nostalgia for the passing of history, eliding the real and the unreal resulting in dystopian effects. In searching for the correct subject matter to evoke feelings of the uncanny, I looked for ambiguous architectural spaces and found that Gothic interiors embody obscurity since churches are now places that not many people frequent in our current time. I have found that representations of Gothic style interiors can act as sites for representations of uncanny experiences and possess uncanny qualities or effects that may make

the space strangely familiar. Vidler states that, "certainly no one building, no special effects of design can be guaranteed to provoke an uncanny feeling" (11) however I question this statement and am trying to show in my work that the effects of design in Gothic architecture and painting techniques can demonstrate evocations of the uncanny.

Replicating a double of the image on screen to the canvas is a simulation of the real. According to Vidler, "Art is uncanny because it vales reality, and also because it tricks. But it does not trick because of what it is itself. Rather, it possesses the power to deceive because of the projected desire of the observer" (35). If art is the doubling of nature, then the experience of painting is uncanny, creating a double of an experience. I'm not trying to paint an exact true likeness of the Gothic interiors; I'm painting them as structures that contain my inner self, my inner immensity of memory, and they act as a metaphor for the interior of my mind. Developing form in representational painting creates a strangely destabilizing feeling in me as details begin to concretize. This disturbing feeling of simulating the real is sometimes unsettling and happens quite frequently in the process of painting. By painting spaces of familiarity or uncertainty, doubling acts as a process of retrieving and reconfiguring my retrospective memories to create a new reality through image making.

The Gothic interior in reality becomes uncanny to me because of the absence of figures, which makes the location seem desolate. Gothic spaces explore the real and the fictive as theatrical narratives. Vidler notes, "The art of memory therefore requires places, either real or imaginary, and images or simulacra which have been invented" (178). Doubling is theatrical and painting empty scenes resembles theatre stages where memories are performed through doubling simulations of experiences. The presence of absence fills the Gothic interior and creates a

haunting feeling for me by a dislocation of memory. The uncanny can be experienced as memory recollections in the present as they reappear from the past. Bachelard describes memory as spectral:

Distant memory only recalls [facts] by giving them a value, a halo, of happiness. But let this value be effaced, and the facts cease to exist. Did they ever exist? Something unreal seeps into the reality of the recollections that are on the borderline between our own personal history and an indefinite pre-history. (58)

This reconfiguration of memory is uncanny and deeply unsettling and I try to employ it in my work, through the doubling recreations of Gothic interiors.

Chapter 3: Methodology

I use representational painting to investigate the various ways we look at and experience grand interior spaces while exploring memory and nostalgia through representation of Gothic spaces, stemming from my personal experiences of living in Italy. The methodology I use in this examination is an interdisciplinary approach involving archival and historical research in correlation with my studio practice. In this chapter, I'm going to give a brief history of Gothic architectural history and how it led to the Gothic Revival in Canada. I will provide material on Gothic Revival churches in Toronto based on research from the Toronto archives and libraries. Then, I will describe my processes and methods I use in my work including digital photography, digital collage and painting.

3.1: Historical Research

3.1.1: The Gothic and Gothic Revival

Gothic architecture originated in the 12th century in France and flourished throughout Europe until the 16th century (Aldrich 24). It was a development of tremendous technical advancement in engineering from Romanesque architecture. Architectural Gothic features include height and grace, dramatic natural lighting, horror, pointed arches, flying buttresses, and ornamental decoration embodying a religious and spiritual ethos, "Gothic architecture overpowered and dwarfed the individual to impress upon him the power of God, in whose 'house' he stood while attending Mass" (14). Towards the 16th century, Gothic was seen as a barbaric style of architecture for its alleged abandonment of classical forms and the style all but disappeared. However, in the 18th century, the Gothic Revival style emerged, flourishing in England and other parts of Europe, and revived Medieval Gothic architecture. Gothic Revival public buildings and houses were often theatrical and resembled stages sets. For many, the Gothic Revival style was

chosen particularly by those “who wished to associate themselves with the past, with scholarship, or with the unusual, the exotic, and the remote” (9), linking design, literature and culture. The mystery of Gothic spaces encompassed a duality of life forms, the physical and the spiritual. Narration of this mystery thrived in literature and “can be called the true starting-point of the Gothic Revival” (Clark 27) where writers described supernatural experiences that investigated reality, imagination and the unusual, and “The idea that reality might have several layers was central to much literature of the Gothic Revival” (18).

3.1.2: The Gothic Revival in Canada

The Gothic Revival movement was brought over to Canada in the 19th century and adopted by early settlers who were building on ancestral Indigenous lands. I acknowledge the traditional Indigenous lands these buildings stand on as they have made an intervention of Indigenous territories.

My analysis will concentrate on three Gothic Revival structures in Toronto, Ontario, which stand on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners of the land. Sites of interest include St. Mary’s Church, St. Michael’s Cathedral Basilica and The Cathedral Church of St. James. I perceive these structures to be theatrical in style and I aspire to create narratives about the evocations within these Gothic interiors. I interpret these spaces through the technique of photographic editing in Photoshop, where I accentuate the theatricality that these spaces evoke. Upon entering these churches, I feel nostalgic while also feeling uneasy and disconnected as they trigger my memories of experiencing Gothic spaces in Italy. For this reason, I visited the churches only once last autumn, solely to photograph them.

In the following research, I drew on the Toronto Archives and library sources but found limitations with gathering information. I visited the OCAD University Library and the Toronto Reference Library but found the majority of the information from the Toronto archives. My research did not unearth information about St. Mary's Church in the libraries or in the archives but fortunately, I found an article on the Internet written by Professor Malcolm Thurlby who teaches at York University in Toronto.

3.1.2.1: St. Mary's Church

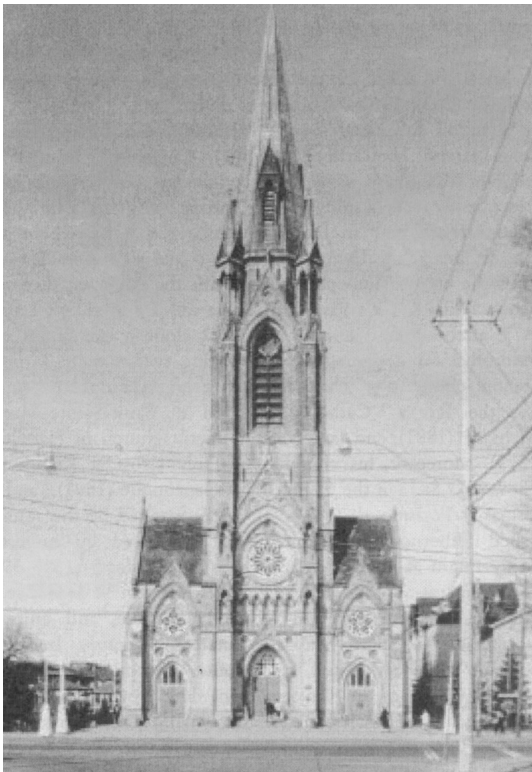


Fig 2: St. Mary's Church, c1884. Source: Professor Malcolm Thurlby's essay in *Ecclesiology Today* 33



Fig 3: St. Mary's Church, 2018

St. Mary's Church is a Roman Catholic Church designed by the Irish Canadian architect Joseph Connolly in 1885. Connolly was born in Limerick Ireland and immigrated to Canada in 1873. He was known as the 'Irish-Canadian Pugin' reflecting his influences from J.J. McCarthy and Augustus W. Pugin (Thurlby 31) and was commissioned to design and remodel several Roman

Catholic churches in the Gothic style, in particular St. Mary's Church. "McCarthy soon assimilated the rudiments of Irish medieval Gothic design and, in doing so, began to interpret, rather than simply imitate, his models" (31). He was also highly influenced by the contemporary architects in England and Ireland, as well as the early Gothic style in Northern France. St. Mary's Church was erected on McDonnell Square, constructed to accommodate a large Irish Catholic working-class community during this period. The cornerstone was laid in 1884. Connolly worked in collaboration with A. W. Holmes, who built the spire. The church resembles E.W. Pugin and G.C. Ashlin's St. Augustine's Church in Dublin, as well as McCarthy's Monaghan Cathedral. His design and influences directly reflected his Irish heritage, serving as reminders of his homeland (38). He also worked on decorations and alterations on St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica, in Toronto.

3.1.2.2: St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica

St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica was planned 22 years before the Canadian Confederation. According to the Toronto Archives, its location was on the north section of a market garden, which extended to Lot (Queen) Street. Fr. Michael Power was named First Bishop of Toronto in 1842 and at this time the population of Toronto was 13,000 including 3,000 Catholics². Bishop Power made the purchase of the land partly with his own savings. Architect William Thomas was born in Suffolk England and immigrated to Canada with his family in 1843. Winning a commission, he designed the St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica and the construction began in 1845 (Richardson et al. 243).

² For more information, see "A Story in Faith and Generosity" in the City of Toronto Archives.



Fig. 4: St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica, c1860, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1568, Item 219



Fig. 5: St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica, 2018

At the time, the church was enclosed by wild-forested land. Located on the beautiful green space at McGill Square, the cathedral was built in Gothic style brick including buttresses decorated by colonnettes, roll mouldings that run along the windows and exposed structural roof trusses (243). Thomas was influenced by his brother's sculptures in the new Parliament buildings in Westminster. The architecture was fashioned after York Minster of England, one of the biggest examples of 14th Century Gothic style³. Decorations and construction are matters of astonishment, wonder and admiration. It was decorated in Gothic style as an adaptation of the classical Roman style to the requirements of Christian worship. Henry Langley completed the tower after Thomas' death, a design much more ornamental than anticipated (Richardson et al. 244). The Cathedral was the largest in Toronto and its interior was influenced by architect James O'Donnell's Notre-Dame Basilica in Montreal (244). Neither Thomas nor Bishop Michael Power lived to see the

³ For more information, see "Mayors Radio Address" of the City of Toronto Archives.

completion of the cathedral. Bishop Power died from Typhus, an illness spread among 90,000 Irish immigrants who fled the famine in 1847 (244). Power's successor was Bishop Armand-Francois-Marie de Charbonnel, who sought the completion of the cathedral, featuring the large stained-glass window made by artist Etienne Thevenot. Large portions of the glass came from Austria and Munich, Germany (245; Toronto Archives).

3.1.2.3: The Cathedral Church of St. James



Fig. 6: The Cathedral Church of St. James, c.1885-1895.
City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1478, Item 3



Fig. 7: The Cathedral Church of St. James, 2018

According to the Toronto Archives, Toronto was a meeting place in the late 1700's for three trade routes – the Natives from the North, the French from the East, and the English from the South. The land was original forest and the Cathedral Church of St. James was built to sustain a large population, the Anglican Diocese of Toronto. The congregation was organized in 1797 as the first Christian denomination in this part of Canada. In 1803, Governor Simcoe and garrison soldiers,

who had been worshipping in Government house for 6 years, helped build the cathedral⁴.

It was the first cathedral built in Toronto (or York as it was called during this time period) and was made out of wood, completed in 1807. The cathedral was altered in 1818 to accommodate the growing population. In 1839, Archdeacon John Strachan became Bishop of Toronto and ten years later, the great city fire destroyed most of the city of Toronto and demolished the church (Stout 1). Born in London England, Fredrick William Cumberland held a reputation as Toronto's leading architect and won a competition to initiate the rebuild (Richardson et al. 245). His designs infused the Gothic style with the influence of England's Salisbury Cathedral (247). Cumberland partnered with William G. Storm and Thomas Ridout in the cathedral's reconstruction and artistic plan⁵ and collaborated with Henry Langley for his design of the porches, tower and spire (Stout 1). The spire was the highest in the city and the illuminated clock was used to guide ships into the harbour. The church was built out of white brick with stone moulding and facings, it is an example of early English Gothic architecture. Features I'm focusing on in my paintings are the pointed arches with the diagonal and transverse ribs, capitals, the tie-beams, the clerestory that admits a light source and the nave with large stained glass windows that admit a larger light source.

3.2: Studio Based Research

3.2.1: Photographic Documentation

My photographic research began by looking at books on photography and its origin, which included reading *Photography in Canada 1960 – 2000* by Andrea Kunard. I was searching for Canadian artists who were using photography as a tool in their painting practice as I'm curious

⁴ For more information, see St. James Archival File in the City of Toronto Archives.

⁵ Ibid.

about other artists' relationships with photography.

I started photographing the sites of interest in Toronto, documenting Gothic elements including ornamental detailing, capturing the element of light that fills the interior to create an airy feeling within the space and photographing light reflection. I photographed the interiors at various angles and was particularly drawn to one-point perspective, where all lines converge to a vanishing point on the horizon line. Focusing on this type of view gives the illusion of depth to the painting and draws the viewer in. At this point in my research, I was questioning the limits of the photo.

Photography captures a moment of fascination I have with the space, but I believe that the photo has particular limits and does not communicate the emotion or feeling of a space. It is through painting and the engagement with the medium where I feel can communicate the experience of the space. I question if painting has the capacity to further photography.

Canadian artist Jack Chambers was an influence on my work as he was a photo-realist painter working from photography. His paintings depicted *perceptual realism*, a term he used to describe his work as an engagement of a multi-sensorial experience with the medium (Smart 104). His experience with painting combined photography, painting and spirituality through the engagement with light and the medium of paint. Working during a time when painting was deemed as dead, championing the photo and rendering painting as subordinate, Chambers felt his experience with the camera had several limitations and claimed the camera vision and human vision complimented each other as a symbol of his third vision: *perceptualism* (104). Photography assists with the recording of an experience but can only bring the painter so far, where memory and imagination surpass and record movement through time. Tom Smart explains Chamber's assertion of the photo:

Memories and impressions record reality over time, while photography, although mimetic, gives a false, transfixed and detail-laden description of reality paradoxically opposed to memory images. Photography is fixed, stiff instant, isolated from the continuum of reality in the matrix of space and time (99).

Similar to Chambers, I believe that painting transcends the photo. The photograph is not only a mirror of reality but also a tool for interpreting an experience. The function of my painting in relation to my digital collages I have created give the image more dimensionality and for me create more of a believable reality when painted large-scale.



Fig. 8: *401 Towards London No. 1*, Jack Chambers, 1968-69, oil on wood. 183cm x 244cm. Source: Art Canada Institute.



Fig. 9: *Photographic Studies for 401 Towards London No. 2*, Jack Chambers, 1968-69. Source: Art Canada Institute.

3.2.2: Digital Collaging

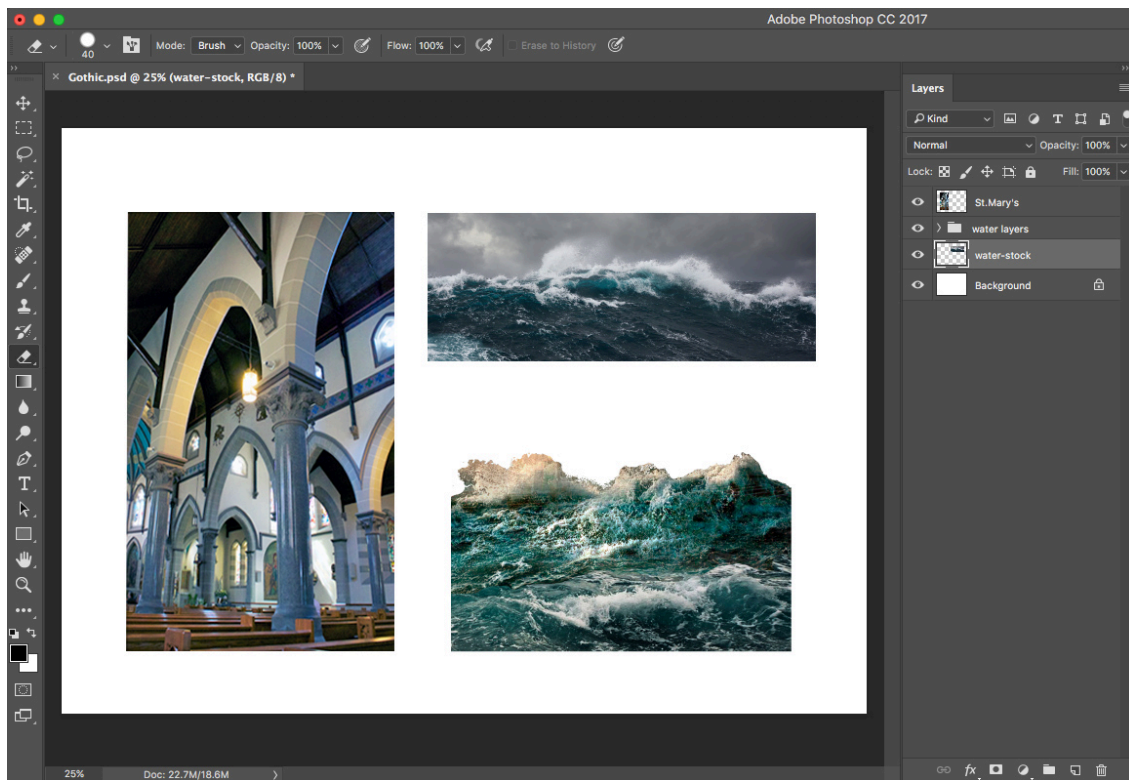


Fig. 10: Digital Collage Screenshot in Photoshop

Digital collage is an assemblage of digital imagery that is fragmented and layered together to make one image (Bloom 5). After taking, sourcing and collecting my photographs (typically found images and stock photography mixed with my own photos), I import them into Photoshop where I start to play with the possibilities of narration to create images or stories about these spaces.

Technology mediates the relationship of architectural environments in my work and the screen acts as the digital environment that helps me to manipulate pictorial space in order to develop a deeper understanding of the historical relationships of painting and photography. Digital collaging allows me to add and subtract various details that accentuate the scene by layering and masking several images. Using Photoshop's tools and filters, I play with lighting and saturation, change hues, add gradients and overlay effects to give the image more depth. The narrative aspects of this process involves ways of assisting me to visualize subject matter for my oil paintings and this process allows my imagination to take over where I make spatial accentuations, compositional adjustments and contrasting forms to create playful and mysterious atmospheres I can use as reference for my paintings.

Canadian First Nations artist Kent Monkman employs a similar methodology. He draws upon classical techniques of painting with the inclusion of photography and digital collaging in order to construct his compositions. In his interview with *The Globe and Mail*, he explains his process, which includes compiling several photographs from his models in his studio and importing the photos into Photoshop where he stages the figures for repositioning, cropping and layering (Bascaramurty, "The Modern Touch of an Old Master"). His trained assistants work on sketching from a projector, and use the photographic digital collage as reference using iPads. Rather than

seeking out models to photograph, I seek out architectural interiors and natural phenomena, to create my digital collages. My collages are assembled in Photoshop and they inspire my paintings, which are devoid of figures.



Fig. 11: *Miss Europe*, Kent Monkman, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 84" x 132". Source: Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery.

3.2.3: Painting Process

Photography and digital collaging assist with the process of painting a pictorial reality. Painting serves as a model of transcribing the experiential space, moving beyond what the physical body experiences by accentuating elements, which serve as visual stimuli for a sensorial experience, moving beyond sight. The method of representational painting is used as a mnemonic tool for recreating a bodily experience and also a means of drawing myself closer to my memories. I employ classical techniques of painting learned with my professor Maria Gabankova in Florence Italy.

Using my digital collaged compositions as reference, I begin painting by sketching the line-work on canvas in burnt sienna or burnt umber in acrylic onto the canvas. A fundamental point in the process, this is where all of the compositional issues arise and need resolving. Painting the sketch in acrylic allows for quick drying, adjusting and painting over if necessary. The under-painting is then blocked in with oils. I usually abandon the painting to dry at this point and start the same process with another painting. Working on several paintings simultaneously achieves a sense of unity.



Fig. 12: Compositional Sketch



Fig. 13: Underpainting of St. Mary's Church

Employing several classical painting techniques throughout the process tends to be consistent in my work. I paint with the technique of *alla prima*⁶ (wet-on-wet) and usually do not return to the painting to touch up, remodel or rework, as it stands completed in its gestural style. If I feel the

⁶ See Mayer, p126 and 292 for more information on this technique.

painting needs more work, *impasto*⁷ (thick paint) is used to establish texture or density. I also employ *imprimatura*⁸ (first painted layer) where parts of the initial sketch in burnt umber/sienna are left visible in the finished painting. Atmospheric perspective and *sfumato*⁹ (adding a smokey, blurry effect to eliminate lines or borders) are used as well in order to establish more depth and draw the viewer into the piece.

In British Anthropologist Tim Ingold's work titled, *Ways of Mind-walking: Reading, Writing and Painting*, he describes visual practices and explains how paintings can be understood to convey meaning. Ingold explains ethnographer Howard Morphy's understanding of "how to 'read' a painting as a story, moving around the picture plane as the events of the narrative unfold" (19). For Morphy, "paintings do not encode but reveal [meaning]" (20). Similarly, for me, painting is where I can narrate my history, revealing a world of experiences and memories. I am particularly interested in an engagement with the material of paint and the multi-sensorial experience that is possible with the medium. The romanticism of painting, the fluidity of paint application, the tangibility of the material, combined with olfactory and visual stimulation all contribute to the multi-sensorial process of oil painting which evoke several emotions in me during the process. Art Historian and critic James Elkins talks about the experience of oil painting and makes note of the obsession with paint that an artist can develop:

To a nonpainter, oil paint is uninteresting and faintly unpleasant. To a painter, it is the life's blood: a substance so utterly entrancing, infuriating, and ravishingly beautiful that it makes it worthwhile to go back into the studio every morning, year after year, for an entire lifetime. As the decades go by, a painter's life becomes a life lived with oil paint, a story told in the thicknesses of oil. (4)

⁷ See Mayer, p151, 628

⁸ Ibid., p271, 628

⁹ For more information on *sfumato*, see <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/sfumato>.

I have grown a deep admiration for the material of my practice and it has become utterly addictive. This love for the material I believe is communicated by the several techniques I employ in my process of painting. Building up several layers of paint reaches a certain magical point, as Elkins notes, where it becomes difficult to tell how the work has been painted (12).

In terms of dimension, large-scale works are what I aspire to as they have more impact and if painted carefully enough, have the power to hold the viewer's attention to the Gothic interiors and natural phenomena; water, ice, storms and weather. I strive for the painting to evoke the same feeling of the phenomenological experience witnessed by standing in these spaces, which is why large-scale is significant. I want the work to suggest the power of absence as presence, a spatial uncanny – unusual spaces that trigger nostalgia or memory. There is an absence of human kind, only a memory or an imprint of the human hand: the hands that created these Gothic architectural spaces, and my hand, the hand that painted this work. I might recall my own memory of the space by illustrating a fragmentation of the architectural space. Never is an experience fully recalled, only fragments of memories are collected, and these fragments sometimes trigger personal and historical memories as well.

I choose a vertical orientation for my work, to simulate the interior space within the Gothic interiors I portray, emphasizing height, which is also a Gothic architectural form. The elongated picture plane gives the painting stature and more possibility for cropping, suggesting infinity of space. The verticality usually draws the eye upward, however as the water or ice engulfs the space, the eye is drawn back downward toward the ground.



Fig. 14: *Arc*, Denyse Thomasos, 2009. Acrylic on canvas, 132" x 240". Source: Canadian Art.

While researching ways that contemporary artists have depicted architectural space, I discovered the work of the late abstract artist Denyse Thomasos. Her practice stemmed from a political place investigating identity and culture. In an interview with Rutgers Observer TV, she explained her process where she initiated image research by looking at photographs of prisons, structures of confinement, slave boats, prisons and places of confinement for people of colour (Kandic, “Denyse Thomasos Interview”). Her painting was architectural and abstract to recreate structures of what she called ‘confined psychology’. She used the photographs as reference, as she placed the images on the wall around her painting for visual assistance. Once she fully comprehended the architectural structure, Thomasos took liberties within her abstract paintings and abandoned the photographic reference altogether. Her large-scale paintings influenced my approach to the compositions of my perspectival paintings as I try to create an illusion of depth, verisimilitude, and a sense of entrancement.

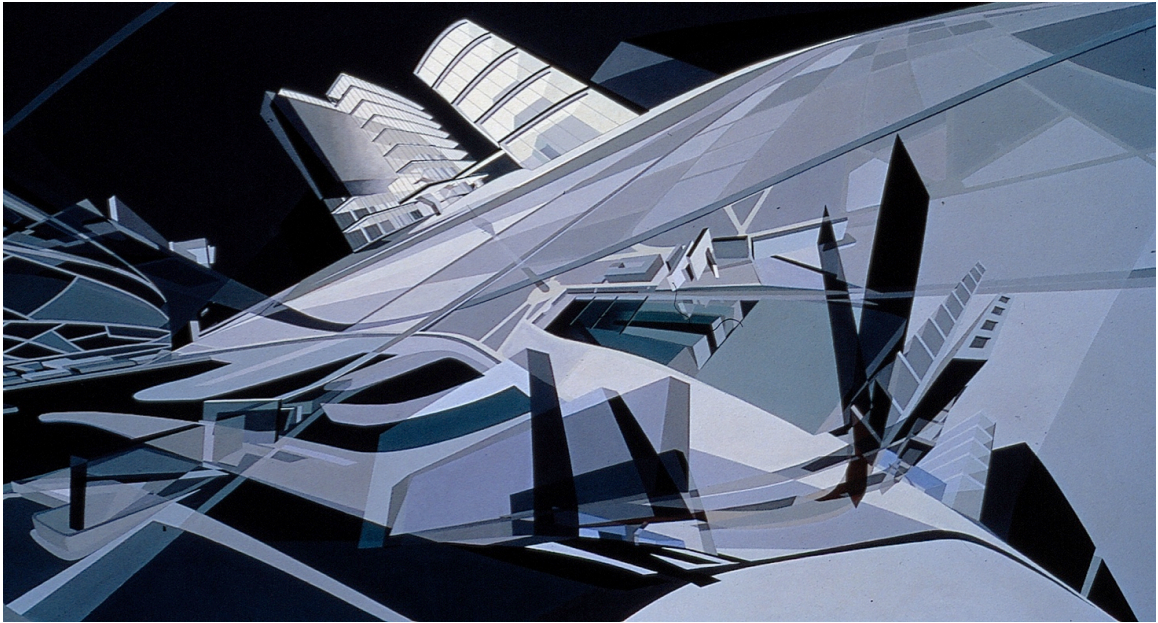


Fig. 15: *KMR Art and Media Centre*, Zaha Hadid 1989/93. Source: Arch Daily.

The late architect, Zaha Hadid, whose neo-futuristic designs revolutionized the architectural world, also made sketches and abstract paintings, offering the viewer renewed ways of looking at architecture in the urban environment. These works are abstract paintings, whereas I am working in representational painting. I found her use of contrasting light and darks combined with her sharp eye for design and bold shapes influential when developing my digital collages. Hadid's architectural drawings and paintings serve as an example of reinventing various ways of experiencing architectural spaces.

This method of painting is also pertinent to the return to traditional forms of painting in terms of metaphor and technique. The development of my work is related to a revival of Gothic arts, a return to beauty and aesthetics perhaps as a movement away from pure conceptual art and using it as a metaphor for a renewal of traditional forms of painting. The theatrics of the Gothic narratives I am creating in my paintings also parallel how I use light in my process. In Gothic architecture, light is highly symbolic, "allowing the worshipper to experience physical and spiritual

‘illumination’ simultaneously” (Aldrich 17). Light is also a very strong aspect of the oil painting process, as the underpainting becomes luminous. The fluidity of light achieved through layering, addition and animation is also very theatrical. Recreating the feeling of awe and sense of bodily scale in painting, the mystery lies in the scenarios I can narrate through the method of oil painting, not only playing with lighting, but also the positioning, scaling and exposure of certain details in representational painting.

3.3: Artist Residency - 2 Rooms Contemporary Art Projects



Fig. 16: 2 Rooms Contemporary Art Residency



Fig. 17: 2 Rooms Contemporary Art Gallery

While doing my research, I also took on an artist residency for three weeks at the 2 Rooms Contemporary Art Projects in the remote village of Duntara in Bonavista, Newfoundland. Here, I was able to investigate the natural geologically elevated forms of rocks and cliffs. Through photography and painting, I studied the sublime in nature and how the physical body reacts to natural spaces of grandeur, in hopes of furthering my comprehension of Burke’s theory of the sublime. I found the experience of witnessing nature’s immensity equally awe-inspiring as much

as terrifying, and paralleled such experiences to the feeling of awe inspired by the architectural structures of immensity such as the Gothic interiors I portray. Spaces of grandeur, both in nature and architecture, have the power to evoke strong emotions and stimulate memory and I attempted to duplicate this process in painting through combining the two. I sketched, photographed and painted several studies of rocks during the residency. My photographs of the natural phenomena were then imported into Photoshop where I juxtaposed them within the Gothic interiors that I photographed in Toronto. This juxtaposition of the exterior elements of Newfoundland invading the Gothic interior spaces has allowed me to create a personal pictorial language, enabling me to communicate my memories of my Italian life and express my Canadian identity. This methodology has developed new meaning for me and created a new way of seeing architecture through the reconstruction of memories.



Fig. 18: Keels, Newfoundland



Fig. 19: Bonavista, Newfoundland

The exhibition relives the history of our feelings.
- Tim Ingold

Chapter 4: Discussion of the Work | Results

The exhibition of this thesis work will be held at OCAD University's Graduate Gallery on Friday, April 27th, 2018. It will include three large-scale oil paintings sized at 8' x 4' and small studies of the paintings before moving to large-scale. The three large-scale paintings will be exhibited one per wall to create a strong impression of being enveloped within a surrounding Gothic interior space, with the accompaniment of strong elements of the natural world; water, ice, and rocky formations.



Fig. 20: *St. Mary's Church*, oil on canvas

St. Mary's Church

In the painting of St. Mary's Church, I tried to convey the terror of the sublime in Gothic interiors alluding to the dwarfing of bodily scale that the viewer may feel within a Gothic church.

Presenting the viewer with a skewed confrontation with the space evokes a feeling of dislocation and the infinitesimal alongside the grandiose. The viewer's awareness of their bodily scale happens as the perspective forces the view upwards. The dark, choppy, turbulent water fills the bottom section and threatens the stability of the structure.



Fig. 21: St. Mary's Church Interior



Fig. 22: Digital Collage with Water

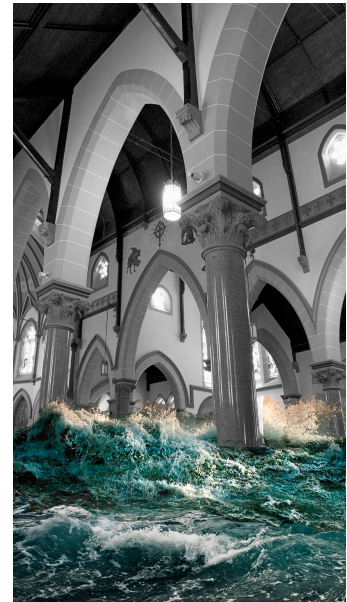


Fig. 23: Digital Collage in Black and White I

While creating my composition in the preliminary process, I recalled my memories of living in Florence where earthquakes would frequently occur. Italy is one of the most seismically active regions in Europe, with several major fault lines, and I experienced several earthquakes while living in Florence over several years. One particular morning, after experiencing an earthquake in the middle of the night, I noticed a large new crack had appeared in the wall of my living room. I also recalled a particular day in 2012, when a piece of marble fell from Giotto's bell tower and

onto a passing car. What provoked this occurrence? The idea of this grandiose and ancient monument collapsing has never left my mind as I ponder the fragility of all human structures. Thinking about this event and the earthquakes that I've experienced, the representation of such a feeling captured through painting is a way for me to reconcile my fears of earthquakes. I photographed St. Mary's Church from several sharp angles and imported the photos into Photoshop. I recalled the choppy, turbulent waters of Newfoundland and envisioned the water entering the Gothic space. Stocks photos of stormy water were sources from the Internet and imported into Photoshop to create my digital collage. My decision to paint the church in black and white represents the history of this event, while the deep blues and greens of the water are vivid and lush like the waters I experienced in the Canadian landscape of Newfoundland. The encroaching flood is metaphorical for the cleansing of my fear of earthquakes.



Fig. 24: *Study for St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica*



Fig. 25: *St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica*, oil on canvas

St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica

In the painting titled *St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica*, the setting is a Gothic Revival interior with an open ceiling revealing a nightscape of stars and constellations. I drew inspiration from my residency in Newfoundland for this painting. The dark sky at night in Duntara is the perfect place for astronomical observations and I tried to incorporate this experience to create a dark and magical atmosphere. Calm waters fill the space with an iceberg at the center of the altar, nature's own monument, which stabilizes the composition. During my residency, there were several icebergs passing by Duntara and I had the good fortune of witnessing this natural phenomenon. These huge glacial giants coasting down the Atlantic varied in all shapes and sizes and to catch a glimpse of one in passing was absolutely mesmerizing.



Fig. 26: Iceberg, Newfoundland

This was an experience I hadn't imagined having while living in Canada and made me fall in love again with the Canadian landscape.



Fig. 27: Iceberg and Water, Newfoundland

Drawing from this experience, I imagined filling a cathedral with a strong current of water as an iceberg appears at the central viewpoint. This painting signifies my departure from Italian architectural inspiration as I redevelop my adoration of the Canadian landscape.



Fig. 28: St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica Interior



Fig. 29: St. Michael's Digital Collage with Water



Fig. 30: Digital Collage with Iceberg

The reconfiguration of space in this painting is uncanny and creates uncanny effects in me as a viewer. The iceberg in the center acts as a semi-translucent object through which light passes from the stained glass window. However, it is a nocturnal scene as the starscape illuminates the architecture from above. The starscape acts as a light source while the iceberg shines light on the interior walls and stained glass window. As well, juxtaposition of this massive natural phenomenon entering the interior is eerie and mysterious.



Fig. 31: Study for *The Cathedral Church of St. James*



Fig. 32: *The Cathedral Church of St. James*, oil on canvas

The Cathedral Church of St. James

In the painting of the Cathedral Church of St. James, I drew inspiration from my experiences in Newfoundland as well. During the time leading up to my artist residency, I saw images on Instagram of ice that filled the Duntara Bay in June, a very unusual phenomenon in summer, which I had expected and hoped to witness during the month of my residency in July. Sadly disappointed by its disappearance by July, I found inspiration elsewhere. I painted studies primarily of rock formations and for this large-scale painting. I made several sketches of rocks and cliffs en plein air and took photographs of them before bringing them back to my studio.



Fig. 33: Rocks in Keels I, Newfoundland



Fig. 34: *Rock Study I*, acrylic on board



Fig. 35: Rocks in Keels II, Newfoundland



Fig. 36: *Rock Study II*, acrylic on board



Fig. 37: Rocks in Keels III, Newfoundland



Fig. 38: Sketch of Rocks in Duntara, Newfoundland



Fig. 39: Sketch of Rocks and Water in Duntara, Newfoundland

While planning my composition, I imported several images of my photography into Photoshop and let my imagination take over the composition, combined images of ice sourced from the Internet with my photographs of the rocks juxtaposing them within my Gothic interior photography.



Fig. 40: The Cathedral Church of St. James Interior



Fig. 41: Digital Collage with Ice and Rocks



Fig. 42: Digital Collage in Black and White II

The composition has a slightly offset perspective, bringing the viewer into the space and closer to the altar, encouraging a closer view of the rocks. The digital collage was used as reference for my large-scale oil painting. Drawing the viewer closer and into a more intimate location within the space creates more of a tangible feeling that the viewer may be able to walk into the space. Reconfiguration of space is uncanny and this is once again revealed through the juxtaposition of the natural elements inside the Gothic interior. The simulation of wilderness within a Gothic interior setting, for me, evokes the uncanny. The rocks and ice are jagged in their forms and provoke a feeling of terror that parallels my experience in Duntara, witnessing the Burkean sublime of nature, while sketching on the exposed and wind-blown seaside cliffs.

As each viewer projects their own perceptions on the work, it may be read in many ways.

Pallasmaa states that, “When experiencing a work of art, a curious exchange takes place, the work of art projects its aura, and we project our emotions and precepts of the work” (33). These

paintings may be read by some viewers in a religious context, as the subject matter obviously depicts Gothic churches being filled with water, perhaps as an intimation of the narrative of the biblical flood. However, the Gothic interior serves as a metaphor for my memory and history in Italy. The work may also be read as exemplifying environmental themes, especially in reference to the painting of St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica where there is an iceberg that seems to be melting in the center of the painting. I'm depicting the natural phenomena as a metaphor for my present life in Canada. The encapsulation of the two is a symbol of my identity embodying both Italian and Canadian cultures. The endless wonder of narrative painting is its ability to accommodate the unique interpretations of individual viewers, in all of their complexities. It can be read like a puzzle or a book, unfolding its meaning on a multitude of levels to be read and reread in many different ways.

Chapter 5: Conclusion | Summary

The culmination of this project led to new meaning in my work. The project investigated possible reactions to Gothic interiors and how my paintings can communicate a narrative through the themes of the sublime and the uncanny. This project was grounded in these two questions: How can we examine Gothic interiors through representational painting? To what extent can contemporary painting unfold an evocative capacity with respect to the uncanny, the sublime or memory?

To address the question, “How can we examine Gothic interiors through representational painting?” I investigated qualities of Gothic Revival architecture, as they reflect the sublime and reference my experiences. I also collected archival research from the City of Toronto Archives on Gothic Revival architecture in Toronto. This research deepened my understanding of Gothic Revival forms as they relate to my artwork, and how to design the settings. If history records the real, I began to question the history of that which was not documented as I found many limitations in researching St. Mary’s Church. To address the question, “To what extent can contemporary painting unfold an evocative capacity with respect to the uncanny, the sublime or memory?” I began consulting textual resources, which provided me with information about how to understand the body’s reactions to space around us and to further my knowledge on how to provoke feelings of the sublime and the uncanny as a way to work through my own personal feelings of reverse culture shock. I developed several case studies of artists working with similar subject matters and methods and expanded my understanding of how to use and respect photography as a tool of reference. I read several texts on painting as a practice, which underscored why I chose oil paint as the most appropriate medium due to its versatility in the various techniques applied. Its richness of surface and depth of illusion convey mood and emotion while giving ample drying

time, which provided me with time to work on other paintings simultaneously and achieve a sense of unity within this series of painting.

This project became deeply personal as I continued my research and revealed that settling my history of living in Europe is what ultimately drives my current oeuvre. Through this project, I have settled several feelings and emotions from returning home from Italy through the practice of art making and developed an immense appreciation and reconnection with Canada's awe-inspiring landscape. This thesis exhibition presents a body of work and a series of paintings that propose to evoke the sublime and the uncanny, in my attempt to reconcile my past in Italy, and the erosion of the life I had built there. Through my construction of an interdisciplinary methodology, at the confluence of research, digital photography and collage, historical painting, and the depiction of natural phenomena, I have attempted synthesis with my materials. I have combined new and old technologies to create new realities. And in doing so, I believe I have created a sensual experience for my viewers.

Findings

An interesting dynamic that arose while researching was that my work might signal a Gothic Revival that is currently happening: a movement away from minimalism, modernism and a technological overload. While considering my narration of Gothic notions regarding architectural space as terrifying and anxiety provoking, I'm calling attention to the potentially profound impacts on the body of architectural space, and making this phenomenological study a centrepiece of my research, and an inspiration for my painting. The Gothic Revival, in this sense, is used as a metaphor for a renewal of traditional painting techniques, assisted and conditioned by new technologies such as digital photography and Photoshop. I'm not contending that we are reverting

to old traditions or propose going backward in time, however I am contending that the combination of traditional techniques with new technologies could address a more sensorial experience within the architectural spaces we depict and inhabit.

This project also made me more aware of those who are working to reconcile Canada's Indigenous histories. Over the last two years of studying at OCAD University, I have been influenced by the Indigenous actions towards decolonization and acknowledging the sacred lands we stand and create upon. One of my colleagues is an interdisciplinary Anishinaabe artist and writer from Nipissing First Nation, and her role in this program has been influential in widening my perspective on Canada's history. In researching the history of the Gothic Revival churches in Toronto, I found that settlers built these structures in order to accommodate other settlers. In relation to my own background having lived in Italy, this project has made me aware of the significance of origin. I also found an interesting connection between the subject matter of the sacred lands, in a sacred space with the sacred imagery of water.

Questions/Avenues for Future Investigation

Through this analysis of space, the multi-sensorial aspects of the Gothic interiors, the complexity of the impact of architectural space on the body, and the mystery and anxiety created by the uncanny juxtaposition of external natural phenomena within the Gothic interior spaces, have culminated in a body of work that proposes a more holistic perspective and an analysis of the origins of this space, positing the question, Who's space is this? Future questions could perhaps circumference around how painting can create awareness to space.

To conclude, this project is significant to my understanding of how to renew traditional forms of painting through narrating evocations of Gothic forms in combination with powerful phenomena. Through this project, I learned and developed a clearer understanding of how complex memory and reality are intertwined within interior spaces, and how they have the capability to evoke an emotional response within the viewer.



Fig. 43: Memory and Fiction in Gothic Spaces Exhibition, Photo by Kristy Boyce

5.1: PostScript

The results of my thesis paper and exhibition have lead to new discoveries in knowledge that were not evident prior to completion. My thesis exhibition achieved this new knowledge through the unpacking of the following terms: representational art, realism, mimesis, and the Gothic.

Adopting a classification of terms that my work relates to has been helpful in order for the work to move forward.

I have always viewed my work as realistic, as my ultimate goal is to convey a representation of reality. Realism in art is a term “first used in Europe around 1850 to designate a kind of naturalism with a social or political message” (Stokstad 1199). The Realism movement in France rejected the principles of the Salon that included “proper technique and appropriate subject matter” and preferred to record “the unvarnished life” (1017). My thesis research did not set out with a social or political intent, neither have I represented the everyday life. Therefore, my work cannot be understood as “Realism” as defined by art history but perhaps can be more accurately described as representational painting. As defined by the Tate Modern, representational painting is a “blanket term for art that represents some aspect of reality, in a more or less straightforward way”. As I have created a personal pictorial language of representing my reality that embodies my Canadian and Italian cultural identities, this term is more befitting.

Another point to consider is that the work also suggests a mimetic representation. Mimesis and pictorial representation are ideas that are often used interchangeably, and through this exhibition I have found that I am interested in the thrill of illusion, which is classified as a form of mimesis. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines mimesis as a “basic theoretical principle in the creation of art. The word is Greek and means ‘imitation’ (though in the sense of ‘re-presentation’ rather than

of ‘copying’). There are many ways in my work where I distort form and take liberties with perspective, while juxtaposing images that do not necessarily belong. There is a pleasure in mimetic representation or imitation that drives my work, attempting to convey the truth or the illusion of it. For example, there are aspects of contorted perspective in the work as I am interested in the influence of illusion.

I initially thought that my work was addressing ideas of Gothic architecture, however it is actually employing the affects that Gothic architecture potentially have on the viewer. My approach to painting regarding scale and dominance over the viewer is a very important part of trying to mimic an experience of being in a Gothic space. Light as an element of the Gothic is an important concern in my practice as I try to illuminate the space, while simultaneously creating dramatic shadows. This dramatic effect allows the viewer’s eyes to move throughout the space. As well, there are three different forms of Gothic that need clarification in my work: the historic Gothic architecture of Florence, the Gothic Revival of Toronto and my fictional Gothic interiors that I have produced in my work. I believe that the final exhibition has led to awareness that my imagined Gothic interiors embody both aspects of the historic Gothic as it relates to memory, and the Gothic Revival as it pertains to my present paintings. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Gothic architecture as an “architectural style in Europe that lasted from the mid 12th century to the 16th century, particularly a style of masonry building characterized by cavernous spaces with the expanse of walls broken up by overlaid tracery”. The Gothic Revival is also defined in The Encyclopaedia Britannica as an “architectural style that drew its inspiration from medieval architecture and competed with the Neoclassical revivals in the United States and Great Britain.” A historical analysis of the two was important in my comprehension of the structures that have triggered my memories.

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